

Russian Moon

Cast

Tracy – Private Detective
Slim – Gal Friday
Trish Norton – Femme Fatale
Mrs. R – Mrs. Cynthia Rockinwealthy
Dan – Mr. Daniel Rockinwealthy
Chef – Cook on “The Big Shot”
Goon
Goon2 – Hired Hands
Mrs. McCreedy – Newspaper Librarian
Stella

(Open Music)

Tracy

It was a dark and stormy night. Pickin’s had been slim around the old P.I. joint. So slim that I couldn’t afford to pay my secretary, Slim. My secretary, that is – her name is Slim. I wasn’t repeating myself. Just wanted to make that clear.

I felt bad about not being able to pay her, but Slim was loyal – that was her best quality. That and the ability to pour two fingers of the best Jack when a fellow needed cheering up. I needed a lot of cheering about now.

Slim

Don’t let it get you down, Tracy. I’m sure some cases will come our way soon! You’re too good a Private Eye and everyone knows it. You’ve solved all the big cases, and you ought to be rich and famous but you don’t take much for yourself because you’re just too modest. And don’t worry about paying me – it’s just enough to be working for you. That’s all the reward I need.

Tracy

You’re a trooper, Slim. But while I don’t have to worry about you skipping out on me, paying the rent is another thing.

Slim

I'll get another job and pay the rent, Tracy! It's worth it just to be in your presence.

Tracy

Ah, you're a sweet kid. But I can't let you do that.

Slim

No, it's no trouble. All I need to do is get home once a day to feed the cat. I can work 10 hours in the day for you, and then another 10 at night doing whatever I can... we'll make it!

Tracy

Well... why don't we drink to that!

Slim

I'll get the booze!

(Sounds of drinks, etc.)

Tracy

*Just as our little celebration was getting underway **she** showed up. She was trouble with a capital "P", but I didn't need a dame who could spell. She had the kind of body that made promises her mouth could deliver COD. Or FOB. In any case, it would be a special delivery. Although perhaps there might be some kind of insurance needed to cover any loss, but for sure there would be a return receipt. And sometimes, just sometimes, you can take an analogy a little too far. She looked like the kind of woman who would.*

Trish

My name is Trish. Trish Norton. And I need your help.

Tracy

I could see she wanted me. Wanted me bad.

Trish

I want you. I want you bad. I've been told you're the best, and I deserve the best. And I always get what I want.

Tracy

Well, sometimes you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes you just might get what you need, if you get my drift. So what's your problem?

Trish

Do we have to talk with... her in the room?

Slim

What do you mean, "her"?

(sounds of a cat fight)

Tracy

I could see there was going to be trouble. Not only that, but the darn cats outside the window had started their nightly ruckus. As I closed the window, I escorted Slim to the front office.

Slim

But Boss! She's no good, I tell you!

Tracy

I can see that, Slim – remember, I am the best private eye around.

Slim

I forgot. Sorry. You're right, as always.

Tracy

Just let me handle her and everything will be okay.

Slim

I shoulda known – you can read women like a book.

Tracy

It's a library I've been a card-carrying member of since I was 13.

I came back into the office. Yes, it was clear that Trish was up to no good, but it was the kind of trouble a man could enjoy. For a while. Then he'd have to cash in his chips before he was busted. Or go all in and hope for a miracle on the river. Either way, it was no-limit where she was concerned, although the buy-in was bound to be very expensive.

So tell me your troubles, sweetheart, while I knock back some of this JB.

Trish
My daddy is D. R. R. Rockinwealthy.

Tracy
Of **the** Rockinwealthy's? (Let's out long whistle) I'm impressed. But you said your name was Norton. And I don't think I've seen you in any of the society papers, at least the ones I read on my days off.

Trish
I use the name Norton to keep the goldiggers away. I'm kind of the black sheep of the family. They'd prefer I remain out of the way. Daddy sent me off to school but they kicked me out for some trouble with the chess club.

Tracy
Trouble with the chess club?

Trish
They found them all in my room late one night. Two of them couldn't speak for several weeks after that, and one entered a nunnery.

Tracy
You mean a monastery?

Trish
No. In any case, I came back home and Daddy tried as always to give me something to take my mind off my problems. So he gave me the Ruby Tuesday.

Tracy
The Ruby Tuesday. (Whistles again)

I knew all about the Ruby Tuesday. It was a ring with the largest ruby known to mankind, worth well over 10 million dollars at a time when you could get a good cup of joe for five cents. I knew the Rockinwealthy's had bought it, but hadn't seen a mention of it in quite some time.

So far it doesn't seem like such a tough life.

Trish
It was okay – until last week, when I lost the ring.

Tracy
You lost it?

Trish
It's sort of foolish. I was on Daddy's boat, the "Big Shot", named after him because he thinks he's so great, and I was wearing the ring for a party he was throwing. He always throws these big parties, and I was trying to be good for a change and act like a nice daughter he'd be proud of. Anyway, I got a little drunk and the next thing I know I'm in bed in the master stateroom with some guy I've never seen before. It turns out he was the galley cook. I'm so embarrassed I run out of there and the next thing I know I can't find the ring anymore. I think I might have left it in the room somewhere.

Tracy
Well, why don't you just go back and get it?

Trish
(Coyly) Well, that's the point. Daddy got wind of my behavior and has kind of banned me from the boat. But he doesn't know I lost the ring – if he finds out he'll never speak to me again and I'll lose my inheritance.

All I need for you to do is to get on the boat somehow and retrieve it from that stateroom. It's the main stateroom below decks. And I have a pretty good idea where it is.

Tracy
You do?

Trish
I think I shoved it under the mattress before we... got frisky. So it should still be there. It's such a little thing for you to do... and I'll pay you a lot. A lot... in every way.

Tracy
She was rotten, she was spoiled, and the whole thing smelled like yesterday's garbage, but her skin was soft and her body warm against mine and a big symphony was going off in my head, the kind where the strings and the horns all swell up and then the cymbals crash at the end and the conductor turns around and the audience gives him a good hand and then you leave but the coatcheck girl gives you the wrong coat so you end up having to come back but the theater is locked and you have to wait until Monday. It was just like that.

Okay, doll, I'll get your ring, and then we'll see what kind of payment options I'll accept.

Trish
Oh, and one more thing – don't let Daddy know you're working for me. He'd figure the whole thing out. You must be discreet.

Tracy
Discreet is my middle name.

Actually, it was David, but I figured that was close enough. I showed her out and Slim was still fuming.

Slim
So what did that cat have to say for herself!

Tracy
Another time, honey. Right now I have to figure a way onto the "Big Shot".

Slim
The Rockinwealthy's yacht?

Tracy
You've heard of it?

Slim
Who hasn't? It's in all the society news.

Tracy
I haven't had time to read it yet – I need to wait until the weekend.

Slim
It seems to me there's a big get-together tonight. Let me check. Yes, here it is, "Big Party on Big Shot". It says everyone who is anyone will be there.

Tracy
Well, I'm someone, babe.

Slim
Oh, Tracy – do you want me to come with you? I'd just need to go home and feed the cat and...

Tracy
It's too dangerous, kiddo. I'm going to have to go in fast, and from the outside, like a linebacker making a sweep. I may need to punt, or pass, or even fake a field goal, and there's no telling if my backfield will be in motion or if I'm going to be called for holding. I'm just telling it to you plain.

Slim
I understand, Boss. But be careful – I know you're capable of taking care of yourself, and any ten men you come across, but I still worry.

Tracy
That's why I keep you around – to keep worrying.

So I dressed in my finest tux and made my way out to the docks, where the lights on the huge ship showed that a party was in full swing. There was a Russian Moon in the sky, red as the commies and like the commies it meant you had to be watchful and never trust anybody, never turn your back on anyone even if it meant you had to spend the evening in a corner. There were two goons standing at the entrance to the ramp.

Goon

Can I see your invitation, sir?

Tracy

My invitation? Sure, here's my invitation!

I grabbed the first brute by the neck and held him in a hammerlock while I whispered in his ear.

One move and I'll push your skull back to your shoulders and you'll have to get your shirts made special, ya here?

His comrade looked helpless but then started to move in. I knew I had to think fast.

Look! Over there! Veronica Lake!

He turned, as any man would, and I threw aside his friend and made my way quickly up the ramp before they knew what had happened.

Once inside I could see it was a swank party. There was a nice little band that was playing a song that has always haunted me.

(Music: Round Midnight, Gil Evans)

Mrs. R.

So, I haven't seen you around here before.

Tracy

It was a dame wearing the lowest cut dress I ever saw, but that's not what drew my peepers. My eyes drifted down her chest where the largest set of matched diamonds I ever saw were set in a beautiful necklace. I looked up and saw she had two diamonds hanging from each ear that would have paid my rent for the rest of my life. She was dripping with wealth, and I was hoping that some of it would splash onto me and get me soaking, or at least a little damp, damp enough that I might need to wipe it off with a towel of some sort.

Yeah, I thought I'd drop in and lend this shindig a little class.

Mrs. R

Well, you certainly bring some excitement here. My name is Cynthia Rockinwealthy, but you can call me Cyn.

Tracy

So this was Mrs. Rockinwealthy. She was sure something, but exactly what I didn't know. But by the way she was rubbing up against me it was clear that she had more in mind than just small talk.

Mrs. Rockinwealthy...

Mrs. R.

Cyn

Tracy

Mrs. Cyn, I don't know if you should be doing that in public.

Mrs. R.

(Coyly) Doing what?

Tracy

Well, for one thing those aren't your pockets your hands are in. And if I'm not mistaken, that's your husband over there in the corner, eyeing us.

Mrs. R

Let him look. He should see what a real man is like sometimes.

Tracy

But just as she was starting to undo my buttons Mr. Rockinwealthy came over to us and I could see he wasn't in a good mood.

Dan

My dear wife, I don't believe I've met your friend.

Mrs. R

Oh, him? Um, this is...

Tracy

Tracy, Gil Tracy.

Dan

Ah, Mr. Tracy. My name is Dan Rockinwealthy.

Tracy

Yeah, I've seen you in the society papers.

Dan

And how do you and my wife know each other?

Mrs. R

Oh, we're old friends, Dan darling.

Dan

Really? Just what is it you do for a living, Mr. Tracy?

Tracy

Oh, a little of this, a little of that. I investigate stuff.

Dan and Mrs. R

You do?

Mrs. R

I mean, yes, you do indeed. Investigate.

Dan

Oh, a Dick named Tracy? That sounds very familiar. And that's very interesting. You and I must have a long talk... soon. But first I need to do something. You'll see that Mr. Tracy is properly entertained, won't you my dear?

Mrs. R

Oh, he'll be entertained.

Tracy

So Mr. Rockinwealthy took off and left me alone with his missus.

Mrs. R

You know, suddenly this party seems too... crowded. Why don't we go to my stateroom where we can have a little privacy?

Tracy

Your stateroom? Is that the master stateroom?

Mrs. R

Yes, it is.

Tracy

Then lead on.

As we started out of the room I heard a hissing sound from one of the plants in the corner.

Slim

Pssst! Boss! Over here!

Tracy

Um, excuse me a moment, Cyn, I need to make a visit to the potted plant.

Mrs. R

Oh you men have the funniest sayings for going to the bathroom. Okay, I'll meet you below decks.

Tracy
What are you doing here, Slim?

Slim
I had to come, Boss. You won't believe what I found out.

Tracy
You found out that Trish Norton isn't Rockinwealthy's daughter.

Slim
How did you know? As usual, Boss, you're one step ahead of me.

Tracy
It was pretty obvious. A dame like that couldn't hardly hide from the papers – she'd have been all over the society news.

Slim
But there's more...

Tracy
Yes, I know. She's actually the famous fan dancer, Trish Van De Meer, the woman with more fans than Joe Dimaggio.

Slim
You're amazing, Boss!

Tracy
I know.

Slim
But how did you...?

Tracy
I once saw her perform at a nightclub in Philly. It was a long time ago, but a man never forgets a fan dance.

Slim
So I guess I didn't need to come after all.

Tracy

That's okay, Slim, you meant well. Now turn your pretty little tail and get home and feed that cat of yours.

Slim

Okay, I will. But Boss...

Tracy

Yes?

Slim

Be careful. I still worry about you.

Tracy

She was cute, Slim, but young and with a lot to learn. It was a hard world, a man's world, and to get along you had to be fast and hard and a man, and able to swing your bat faster and harder than the pitcher, even if he was throwing high and inside, except sometimes you needed to take a pitch, unless there were runners on and then you sometimes had to swing even if you couldn't get a full piece of the ball, just to let them steal. That's how simple it was.

I made my way below decks but Cyn was nowhere to be found. That wasn't exactly true – she opened a cabin door a crack and beckoned me in.

Once inside the stateroom I found the lights low and Mrs. R dressed for action. Which is to say, she wasn't wearing anything but her jewels. She sat on the bed and gave me a come hither look that would have made Anthony betray Caesar.

Mrs. R

Why don't you take a load off?

Tracy

What, exactly, is it that you want from me, Mrs. R?

Mrs. R

Oh. It's Mrs. R, is it? Whatever happened to Cyn?

Tracy

I never mix business with pleasure. And I have the feeling you're about to give me the business.

Mrs. R

(Colder) Well, okay then. You're not only handsome and brave, you're smart to boot. I need to hire you.

Tracy

I'm always looking for work. Let me guess – you want someone to recover the Ruby Tuesday.

Mrs. R

I'm impressed. So you're psychic as well – just what do you know about it?

Tracy

I know there are plenty of people who'd like to get their hands on it.

Mrs. R

It belongs to me!

Tracy

So you say. So when was the last time you saw the ring?

Mrs. R

It was earlier this evening. I always keep it here in this room, hidden under the mattress. But when I came to get dressed for the party it was gone! And only my husband and I have the keys to this room.

Tracy

So your husband must have taken it.

Mrs. R

I suppose – he's so vindictive. My husband doesn't understand me.

Tracy
Doesn't understand you?

Mrs. R
He's always off fooling around with other women. He doesn't care about me, about my needs. So I need to find comfort with... others. Strong men, like yourself.

Tracy
These other women... one of them wouldn't happen to be Trish Van De Meer, would it?

Mrs. R
Trish? That tramp? She's my husband's girlfriend. He met her when her brother the ship's cook brought her to a party.

Tracy
Ah, that explains a lot.

Mrs. R
Does it?

Tracy
This ship's cook – what do you know about him?

Mrs. R
Only that he's very handsome and has extremely gentle hands... when he tosses the salad you can tell. But what does this all have to do with my ring?

Tracy
I'll get your ring back, Mrs. R. You just stay right here and keep warm.

So I stepped outside and there was Slim.

Slim, I thought I told you to go home!

Slim
But I found out something important, Boss!

Tracy

You found out that the cook had a girlfriend named Trish. Trish Van De Meer.

Slim

Boss, you amaze me again! Just how did you know?

Tracy

You can put two and two together when you've been in the business this long. Now, run along like a good little girl while I take care of business.

So I sent her on her way again. She was a little puppy dog, obedient but not too bright. And like a lot of puppies she needed a pat on the head at times as well as a swat on the rear. You could use a rolled up paper for that – somehow they associate the paper with the swat and then you just need to show them the paper. Slim was like that – I needed to show her the paper now and then, if you get my drift.

But I no sooner turned around then lo and behold there was Mr. Rockinwealthy, accompanied by the two goons I had foiled at the dock.

Ah... what a surprise.

Dan

Take him, boys!

Tracy

So they took me to the engine room and roughed me up a little. It was like two jackhammers pounded into my brain, splitting it up into tiny fragments and then stomping on the fragments sending the goo spreading all out onto the pavement. I've had worse.

So, have you had enough?

Dan

You're a real tough guy, aren't you? Let's see how tough you are if I punch the right side of your face a few times. (Sounds of punching).

Tracy
(Speaking out of the corner of his mouth) I'll just have to talk lefty from now on.

Dan
I want to know what you did with the ring!

Tracy
You mean Ruby Tuesday?

Dan
Of course I mean Ruby Tuesday!

Goon
Should I hit him again, boss?

Dan
Don't interrupt me while I'm getting information!

Goon
I am very sorry. I just was not sure if he needed another punch. It was a very indiscriminate situation.

Dan
All right!

Goon
I mean, usually I can tell if a guy is wising you up, and then I just hit him, but this seemed to be a gray area.

Dan
I get your point!

Goon
I did not want to take initiative and then be subject to a reprimand later.

Dan
Will you shut up!

Goon 2
You want I should hit him, Boss?

Goon
Hit me?

Goon 2
I am not exactly sure of the protocol here – is it all right if I hit my fellow goon, or is that never done?

Goon
It's a good point. I would say you should use your own judgment, but it really is not up to me...

Dan
Quiet!! Both of you!!! All right – you hit him, and then you hit him!
(Sounds of two hits)

Goon
Well, that seems more than fair.

Goon 2
I am not sure that I deserved a hit, but the boss is the boss.

Dan
All right – now if you don't start talking I'm going to have them hit you some more instead of each other!

Tracy
You don't scare me any!

But at that moment Slim came out from around a boiler and one of the goons grabbed her.

Goon
Hey, boss! It is that dame we saw earlier. The one I tried to tell you about.

Dan

Who cares? Now we have some leverage. If you don't want to see anything happen to this girl here, Tracy, you'll start talking and talk fast.

Tracy

All right. I'll start talking, but you won't like what I have to say. Your girlfriend, Trish Van De Meer, played you for a sap. She and the cook were in on it. They were trying to get you or Cynthia to reveal where the ring was hidden and one or the other of you did. But they needed to get into the master stateroom alone, and only the two of you had the key. That's the part I haven't figured out yet.

Dan

Hmmmm. I think I can supply that piece of the puzzle. Earlier this evening I got rid of the tramp Trish.

Tracy

Got rid of her?

Dan

She was a nuisance and it was time to move on to another conquest. So I told her to scram. We were in the stateroom at the time, but I never left her alone. However, I later realized I had left the door unlocked and when I came back to check I found the ring was gone.

Tracy

But Trish didn't take it.

Dan

She must have.

Tracy

No, if she had taken it she wouldn't have needed to hire me to try and get it. No, it must have been the cook, he must have been nosing around and heard what was going on, and snuck into the room when you left.

Dan

Yes. Very good detecting, Tracy. Too bad the two of you won't live to see the conclusion. You know too much, and that's too bad for you.

Tracy

But Mr. Rockinwealthy hadn't counted on my fast reflexes and lightning wits. I twisted away from the goons and grabbed Slim and we made our way off the boat faster than you can say Jackie Robinson. We hightailed it to the office and I had her pour four fingers of the finest JD while we sat around and toasted our good luck.

Slim

But Boss – we never found the ring!

Tracy

That's the way it is sometimes – you win some, you lose some, but mostly you count your blessings and enjoy being able to take a breath.

Life is tough, hard and cold, but if you have a full bottle of Jack Daniels, a clean gun, and a good right hook it doesn't need to get any better than that.

Act II

Slim

It was a darkening and somewhat rainy kind of evening. The raindrops were coming down like little cat paws, softly pattering on the roof of our dilapidated office.

Times had been tough – so tough that Tracy hadn't been able to pay me for nearly a month now. I had hung in there because I felt sorry for him. He was such a sap, only getting the cases no one else wanted and then never being able to solve them without some help, usually from me. I didn't have the heart to leave him, but I had to face facts, and sentiment wasn't paying for cat food.

I'm sorry, Tracy, but I am going to have to give my notice.

Tracy

No! Please don't quit, Slim! I don't know what I'd do without you. I'm so sorry!

Slim

Tracy, sorry don't pay the rent.

Tracy

Look, I'll get another job and pay your rent, Slim! It's worth it just to have you around!

Slim

I don't know what you'd do, Tracy – being a private eye is all you know.

I didn't have the heart to tell him that it was unlikely anyone would hire him for anything else.

Tracy

No, I can find something. I can work 10 hours in the day at some labor job, and then another 10 at night doing private detective work... we'll make it!

Slim
Well... I don't know.

Tracy
Please – it's worth it just to have you around here! (Hopeful) Come on?

Slim
(Finally) All right, Tracy. We'll try it for a while.

Tracy
Great! Let's drink to it! I'll get the apple jack!

Slim
*But just as our little celebration was getting underway **she** showed up. I could tell she was big trouble – she was dressed hastily and her bra straps were misaligned and the seams in her stockings weren't straight. She had way too much makeup on, and I'm positive her hair color came out of a bottle. And her perfume was the kind they sold at drugstores in very large containers, for little money.*

Trish
My name is Trish. Trish Norton. And I need your help.

Slim
I could see she wanted to use Tracy – use him like a bunch of Kleenex and then throw him away. But the poor sap had no idea. He just kept making cow eyes at her. She had him totally drooling and he didn't even hide it.

Tracy
I want you. I want you bad.

Trish
Well, sometimes you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes you just might get what you need, if you get my drift. But let's talk about my problem first, shall we? However, I'd rather talk in private.

Slim

I think maybe I should stay in here – just to help.

Tracy

No, no, that's okay. You just go outside and Trish and I will be right in here... talking.

Slim

Against my better judgment I went into the front office and waited while Tracy closed the door behind me. (Sounds of making out from behind the doors)

I listened outside the door for a few minutes and heard them mention The Ruby Tuesday. But something was bothering me so I decided to head down the hall where the newspaper archives were located. It was convenient having the local rag published in the same building we worked – it was the reason I had talked Tracy into opening an office here. It allowed me to do a lot of research and often was the only way I could ever solve the case for him.

Mrs. McCreedy

Here to check the archives, dearie?

Slim

Yes, Mrs. McCreedy.

Mrs. McCreedy

Oh, that detective is so lucky to have a nice young woman like yourself helping him out all the time.

Slim

Well, he's the private eye...

Mrs. McCreedy

Posh and nonsense! Everyone knows it's always you who's the one who solves the case. Anyway, feel free to look at anything you want – I know the files here are supposed to be secret but I think of you as the daughter I never had.

Slim

So I started searching. I had recognized the face of Trish and soon I discovered why. She wasn't Trish Norton at all, but Trish Van De Meer, the woman with more fans than Joe Dimaggio. I once saw her perform at a nightclub in Philly and a woman never forgets another woman doing a fan dance.

I also did some checking on the Ruby Tuesday while I was there and by the time I went back to the office I had enough information to convince me Tracy was in way over his head. Trish had left by then, but he was still dazed and confused.

Tracy

Oh, there you are! I was so afraid you might have left me.

Slim

I was doing research, boss. You know, the kind that solves cases?

Tracy

Let's talk about that another time. Right now I have to figure a way onto the "Big Shot"

Slim

The Rockinwealthy's yacht?

Tracy

You've heard of it?

Slim

Who hasn't, Tracy? It's on the front pages of the newspaper all the time. You know, the paper you never read?

Tracy

(Evasive) Uh, I haven't got time to read. And my glasses need a new prescription.

Slim

(Skeptical) Yeah. Well, the ship was named after a safari he took where he killed a poor, defenseless lion. He's a real cold blood, I tell you. Anyway, I need to tell you something about Trish.

Tracy

Can it wait? I still need to figure out how to get on that boat...

Slim

The ship.

Tracy

The ship?

Slim

A boat is something that goes **on** a ship, boss. Like a lifeboat. The "Big Shot" is a ship.

Tracy

I don't understand.

Slim

I know, boss. But I need to tell you that Trish's name is Van De Meer, not Norton. And she's a former fan dancer.

Tracy

I don't understand that, either. But I need to get on the boat.

Slim

(Sighs) I think there is a big party going on right now. Let's see – yes, it's right here in today's paper...

Tracy

I was going to read it sometime...

Slim

Yeah. Here it is, "Big Party on Big Shot". It says everyone who is anyone will be there.

Tracy

Well, I'm someone, aren't I?

Slim

Tracy, I think I had better come with you and keep you out of trouble. I just need to go home and feed the cat and...

Tracy

(Whining) But I want to go by myself! I don't wanna have you hanging on, telling me what to do all the time. Just once I want to dress up and do it by myself!

Slim

Okay – I understand. But be careful. You know you're not hardly capable of taking care of yourself, let alone anyone else you come across. I worry about you.

Tracy

That's why I have you around – to keep me out of trouble. But I'll be okay.

Slim

So I took him down to a rental I knew would still be open and we got a halfway decent tux, which I dressed him in. He would still have been there, trying to figure out which way the cummerbund went if I hadn't helped. And I patted his head and sent him off.

But the more I got to thinking the more worried I was – he was in way over his head and was just going to get hurt. So I went home and quickly changed into my finest evening gown and heels, and made my way out to the docks in such a hurry I forgot to feed the cat.

There was a Russian Moon out, the kind that sailors used to believe was a sign of bad luck. For me it just made me worry that Tracy was in trouble... and I was right.

I saw Tracy in a bad situation. There were two goons stationed at the front of the ramp leading to the ship, and one of them had him in a hammerlock and the other was tickling him and giving him bad head noggies. They were laughing and teasing him and I knew he'd feel humiliated if I put a stop to it so I simply gave a long whistle and they both looked up at me.

I did my best Veronica Lake impersonation and their jaws dropped open. They let go of Tracy at the same time and admired me, as any man would. I sauntered up as Tracy slipped up the ramp into the ship.

Hi ya, boys!

Goon

Gosh! Miss Lake – do you think we could have your autograph?

Slim

Of course. Now, I really have to make my way onboard – wouldn't want to keep Mr. Rockinwealthy waiting, would we?

Goon

No, no, of course not!

Slim

So I made my way into the main ballroom where the party had come to a standstill. The band was looking at each other, not knowing what to do. I saw Mr. Rockinwealthy eyeing me from across the room and knew I had to make an impression in a hurry.

I went over to the band and asked them if they knew a number I had used to sing in my college days. They eagerly accepted my suggestion, and I stepped up to the microphone as they began to play.

(Song: Round Midnight with Linda Ronstadt)

Dan

That was beautiful. Just beautiful, Miss...?

Slim

You can call me Slim. Everyone does.

Dan

Well, you're certainly not slim on talent. Perhaps you'd like to go below decks, to see the master stateroom.

Slim

No thanks, Mr. Rockinwealthy.

Dan
Call me Dan.

Slim
Dan, I'm not that kind of girl.

Dan
But everyone has their price...

Slim
You are a cold-hearted son of a sea captain, aren't you? Well, this is one lady whose price is more than even **you** could afford.

With that I stormed off, leaving him open-mouthed. He wasn't used to being refused, and not getting his way. But then I saw Tracy being made a fool of by Mrs. Rockinwealthy. She had him dazed and confused and so besmitten he didn't know where he was. I knew I had to do something, but what? I hid behind a potted palm and tried to get his attention.

(Whispers) Psssst. Tracy. Over here!

Tracy
Ah, what are you doing here, Slim? (Whining again) I wanted to do this by myself! Hey, do you know that the gal who hired us isn't named Trish Norton at all?

Slim
She's a fan dancer named Trish Van De Meer!

Tracy
Yes, I already knew that!

Slim
You knew it because I told you, you dolt! Don't you remember?

Tracy
HmMMM. No.

Slim

And Mrs. Rockinwealthy's using you in the same way. You be careful about her.

Tracy

I know I'm young and have a lot to learn. But don't worry about me.

Slim

I have to, boss. Somebody has to.

So as Tracy wandered off I decided to snoop around and see what I could see. As they were serving the hors d'oeuvres I knew I had to get the recipe – they were delicious!

So I went into the kitchen and found the Chef who was busy with the main course, a grand salmon spread on a platter.

Chef

Ah, madame? How can I be of service to you?

Slim

Oh, I'm just investigating things. And I must know your secret!

Chef

(Nervous) Investigating? My secret!? He must have figured it out!
Uh, it is not my fault!

Slim

What isn't your fault?

Chef

She was the one that put me up to it. It was her idea from the beginning to steal it.

Slim

What are you talking about?

Chef

(Trying to cover) Oh, you do not know as well? I was talking about... the menu, of course. That's it, the menu. Mrs. Rockinwealthy, uh, she, uh, wanted me to... steal it from... uh, the other party who was using the same one that, uh...

Slim

You're involved in the Ruby Tuesday theft!

Chef

Non! I mean, oui! Non, I mean, no, I am not involved in that thing. I didn't take it. Oh, what is the use? You are too clever for me. I am no good at this criminal sort of thing. It is much, much harder than making Béarnaise sauce.

Slim

So – out with it! What's your part in all this?

Chef

Trish was the one who came to me. She was as young as a slice of veal, she was beautiful as a rack of lamb, sweet as honey glazed chicken and her lips were mouth watering nectarines. She said we could feast on the Rockinwealthy's riches, if I were willing to cook up a scheme with her.

Slim

It sounds delicious. So what did you brew up?

Chef

Trish kept telling me about this ring, about how it would give us enough money for the rest of our lives. I was to pretend to be her brother. She told me to try and seduce Mrs. Rockinwealthy and she would work on Mr. Rockinwealthy, and one of them would tell us where it was hidden.

She got close enough to Mr. Rockinwealthy to found out his wife kept it hidden under the mattress in the master stateroom. But something must have gone wrong, because she left the ship this evening and told me Mr. Rockinwealthy had broken it off with her and she didn't have time to take the ring.

Slim

But if she didn't take the ring, who did?

Chef

I do not know, but I must finish the main course, mon dieu, or Mr. Rockinwealthy will fire me.

Slim

So I wander downstairs and catch Tracy coming out of the master stateroom.

Tracy, I need to tell you something important.

Tracy

What did you find out?

Slim

The Chef is Trish Van De Meer's lover.

Tracy

You mean brother.

Slim

No, **lover**.

Tracy

Well, that's just sick.

Slim

No, boss, he isn't related to her.

Tracy

Of course he is – when you're someone's brother, you're related to them. That's the way it works.

Slim

No, I mean he isn't her brother! The two of them are working together to try and steal the Ruby Tuesday.

Tracy

This is making my head hurt. Why can't these things be less complicated?

Slim

Boss, I think it's time for us to make an exit and let them sort it out themselves.

Tracy

You're right, this whole thing is scaring the bejesus out of me.

Slim

So I started to leave, with Tracy following behind like the little puppy dog he behaved like. You have to be firm with him, or he'll make a mess and not always on the papers. That's why you always have to make sure you have papers around, though.

But when I turned around I found out he wasn't behind me anymore. I retraced my steps and I saw Tracy being taken below to the engine room by the two goons at the dock and I hurried to follow. As I was slipping into the room they were working him over.

(Sounds of punching and Tracy screaming and yelling for mercy)

Goon

Now, I have barely touched you.

Goon 2

You just slapped his face a little.

Goon

Will you stop crying?

Tracy

But it hurts!

Goon

Here, take my handkerchief. (Sound of nose blowing)

Tracy
I'm sorry – I'm such a baby.

Goon
Well, it is your own fault for sneaking on the ship like that.

Goon 2
It was very disrespectful.

Tracy
I'm sorry.

Goon
And you should not ought to call us names like that. "Goon" indeed.
Oooo, good! Here comes the boss.

Slim
And just as I ducked behind a boiler Mr. Rockinwealthy came in.

Dan
Well, well, what have we here?

Goon
It is that mean private investigator.

Dan
So what have you got to say for yourself.

Tracy
(Childishly stubborn) Nuthin'

Dan
Oh, so now you don't want to talk? Let's see how tough you are if I give you an Indian burn... like this!

Tracy
Owwwww! Owwwwwww!! Not that, anything but that!!

Slim

At that moment I jumped out from behind the boiler to confront them.

You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, three against one and giving a helpless man an Indian burn.

Goon

(Abashed) Well, it does seem somewhat unfair.

Goon 2

I am abashed.

Dan

Young lady! I want to know what your boyfriend here did with my ring.

Slim

He's not my boyfriend, he's my employer.

Goon

I can relate to that.

Goon 2

Me likewise.

Slim

And he didn't take your ring – the Chef took the ring!

Dan

How do you know that?

Tracy

I thought it was Trish.

Slim

It couldn't have been Trish, boss. She wouldn't have hired you if she already had the ring.

Tracy

Oh. I didn't think of that.

Dan

You're saying that Trish was in on this? And to think that I dumped that tramp just this very evening – good thing, too. So she was working with her brother on this?

Slim

The Chef wasn't her brother, Dan, he was her lover. And, boss, the Chef was the only other person besides the Rockinwealthy's who knew where the ring was hidden. But what really gave it away was the Béarnaise sauce.

Dan

The Béarnaise sauce?

Slim

I went to the galley to talk to him tonight and I watched him cooking while I was questioning him. And he left out the tarragon. No French Chef would ever leave out the tarragon unless he was nervous and hiding something.

Dan

Hmmm, that makes sense to me. Let's go to the Chef and we'll get that ring away from him!

Slim

And as Mr. Rockinwealthy turned to leave suddenly Tracy saw his chance and ran away as fast as he could, leaving me standing there.

Tracy

(Yells) Every man for himself!

Slim

Mr. Rockinwealthy looked at me and shrugged.

Dan

If you ever want to work for a real man, you're always welcome here.

Slim

So I went back to the office where I found Tracy hiding behind the file cabinets. I poured him some apple jack and we sat around commiserating for a while. He was devastated we had ended the case without getting any money, but I convinced him we were better off that way. And I promised him I'd stay at least until the end of the week.

So it was off home – at least I could finally feed the cat. Just like Tracy, she was a helpless little creature who relied on me for her whole world.

Life is a good book, some nice thick blankets, and a purring little kitty who curls up next to you. That's all you really need.

Act III

Dan

It was a beautiful and romantic evening. The Russian Moon was up, peeking through the clouds, bringing love and good luck to all people everywhere. As usual I had been fortunate all throughout the week with my business endeavors and now I was rewarding those who helped me by throwing an extravagant and elegant party aboard my yacht, "The Big Shot", named after the successful free throw my best friend had made during the NCAA tournament in my college days. Not only had I named my ship after him, but I had made a permanent scholarship in his name at the school, and the name of my own vessel was a way of keeping the school and my friend in the public eye.

There was only one sour note to the party – I had made up my mind to break off my affair with my girlfriend, Trish Norton, and I wasn't looking forward to it. I took her into the master stateroom to explain things.

Trish, you're a good kid, but I'm a married man and this was a mistake. I don't want to hurt my wife and I need to stop seeing you, for both our sakes.

Trish

But that's silly, Dan! Your wife is a no-good tramp!

Dan

I won't have you talking that way about her.

Trish

But you know it's true! She hates you and makes no secret of it, treating you like dirt. Women throw themselves at you all the time and you are so pure and decent you never have anything to do with them. It took me six months to get you to even go out with me, and all the time your wife is two timing with your ship's Chef and you won't even fire him.

Dan

Well, he is a good cook, and he does a good job. It's not his fault she came on to him. Besides, I really like his Béarnaise sauce.

Trish

Oh, Dan, can't I be sauce enough to you? Come on, there's a bed here – why don't we finally consummate our love?

Dan

Her lips were enticing, and she was incredibly beautiful, but I knew I had to keep my vow to remain faithful no matter what it took.

No. We must both be strong. I have been unfaithful to my wife by merely dining and dancing with you – I do not deserve her love but I'm going to try and be better and earn it from now on. Now, you must leave the ship immediately. It's bad enough that you're here in the stateroom for the first time – if you stay any longer someone might find out!

(Knock on the door)

See? Um, now let's go to the door and let me handle this.

(Door opens)

Goon

Oh. Um, boss, I was worried. I heard voices in there.

Dan

Yes, I was just showing Miss Norton around the ship.

Goon

Well, I did not mean to intrude.

Dan

No, it's no intrusion. Miss Norton was just leaving, weren't you?

Trish

I guess so. (Significantly) Goodbye, Mr. Rockinwealthy.

Dan
Goodbye, my dear.

Goon
Gee, now I feel terrible about this.

Dan
No, it's nothing

Goon
I seem to have interrupted a moment.

Dan
It's not significant at all.

Goon
It seemed to be more than that.

Dan
I'm telling you it wasn't anything at all!

Goon
All right. If you say so. But I am still contrite. But I wanted to tell you about this girl I saw earlier.

Dan
Couldn't it wait until another time?

Goon
I suppose so. But she looked exactly like Veronica Lake! You did not by some chance invite Veronica Lake to the party, did you?

Dan
I really don't have time...

Goon
Because it was very striking. The resemblance. And the boys and I, we had kind of a bet.

Dan

So I left the stateroom and headed upstairs to be with my guests. I could see they were having a good time but something was needed, so I sauntered over to the band and picked up my sax to play a little.

(Song: Round Midnight with sax)

The crowd was too gracious with my humble efforts to entertain them. A beautiful woman who looked like Veronica Lake was eyeing me so I went up to her to say hello.

Dan

Hi, how are you doing?

Slim

Oh! Mr. Rockinwealthy! I had no idea you were so talented.

Dan

Oh, I wish I had some talent. But it's nice of you to say. Are you having a good time here?

Slim

Oh, yes! This is the most elegant party I've ever been to. Um, I would really like it if I could see your stateroom.

Dan

My stateroom? I'm sorry, miss, if I've given you the wrong impression. I'm a happily married man.

Slim

(Seductive) But every man has his price...

Dan

No – my honor is above price, Miss. Now, I'm afraid I'll have to take your leave. Perhaps you can find some son of a sea captain here who will be more available.

I walked off a little shaken, but something about the mention of the stateroom had me uneasy. Then I remembered – I had left it unlocked, and I knew my wife’s ring was hidden there under the mattress.

I quickly went back to check but my worst fears were confirmed – it was gone! Then my wife came into the room and when she saw me checking under the bed she understood.

Mrs. R
No, Dan! How could you?

Dan
I’m sorry, dearest. I’ll get you another.

Mrs. R
Another!? There isn’t any other like the Ruby Tuesday!

Dan
Well, I’ll get you that Hope diamond thing you keep talking about.

Mrs. R
This is just like you! Well, if you don’t get my ring back we’re through, do you hear?

Dan
But darling!

And so saying she stormed out of the room. I felt terrible and went back to the party.

Then I noticed my wife was fawning all over someone in a rented tux. Under normal conditions I would have simply left her alone, but tonight I was feeling sad and melancholy and wanted her company so I wandered over there.

My darling, I don’t believe I’ve met your friend.

Mrs. R
(Drunk and unruly) What? What business is it of yours?

Tracy
Yeah! Why don't you scram, buster?

Dan
I'm sorry – I didn't mean to... I was just trying to say hi.

Mrs. R
Well, hi and goodbye.

Tracy
Yeah, beat it!

Dan
Okay, I'll be going – um, Mr.?

Tracy
Tracy. Tracy's the name, and investigation is the game.

Dan
Oh, you're a private investigator. How interesting.

Tracy
Now get lost, as the lady says.

Dan
All right, anything you say, dear. But perhaps we could talk later...?

She gave the cold shoulder and I moved off. It was clear she wasn't interested in anything I had to say. I was morose and needed cheering up. I decided to go to the gallery and get some chocolate. I also thought I'd confront the Chef about his affair with my wife, just to clear the air.

In the gallery the Chef was busy preparing the food. When I came in he looked at me guiltily and busied himself with the main course, fumbling with the salmon.

Chef
Mon dieu!

Dan
I know all about it, Chef.

Chef
Sacre bleu!

Dan
But it's okay.

Chef
It's okay with you?

Dan
I know she put you up to it.

Chef
Yes, that's right! I never would have thought of the crime if she hadn't suggested it.

Dan
Well, you don't have to be so melodramatic.

Chef
I do not understand.

Dan
Well, I guess technically it is a "crime" but most people don't think of it that way.

Chef
They don't?

Dan
No. Certainly the police and courts don't care about it.

Chef
Mon Dieu, what a country! In France, you could be shot.

Dan

I always thought the French were more sophisticated than Americans. Don't you often have lovers as well as wives?

Chef

Ummm, yes. Perhaps. I think we might perhaps not be talking about the same thing.

Dan

I'm talking about your affair with my wife.

Chef

Oh. Yes. The affair with your wife. Yes, that's certainly the thing I was talking about. Indeed. Well, I think I have to sit down, I'm afraid my heart will explode.

Dan

At that moment the waiters entered the kitchen and removed the main course to serve. The Chef was so shaken he never even looked up.

I'm sorry – I didn't mean to give you a fright.

Chef

It's all right. It's just... So you're not mad?

Dan

How could I be mad at anyone who makes Béarnaise sauce the way you do? Besides – I have been guilty myself. Just tonight I ended my affair with your sister.

Chef

Oh.

Dan

Yes, I'm sorry to say I had to tell her to leave and never come back. But, I see that you are busy and I'm sorry to have disturbed you.

So I left the galley and as I made my way back I ran into a couple of my fine employees who had that rude and nasty private detective between them.

What's going on here?

Goon

This guy has continued to be obstreperous boss!

Goon 2

Do not you mean obnoxious?

Goon

No, I am pretty confident that the correct word is obstreperous.

Goon 2

He was loitering around the master stateroom and we thought he might have something to do with the disappearance of your valuables.

Tracy

Let go of me you apes!

Goon

You are not behaving very nicely. Kindly please keep a civil tongue.

Tracy

If you guys don't let me go I'm going to use some words that will blister the insides of your heads, you sons of a sea captain!!!

Dan

Young man, I have no desire to cause you any harm or discomfort. I'll be glad to talk with you in private, but perhaps we had better go into the engine room where this won't disturb the rest of the guests.

So we make our way down there and this detective is still swearing and cursing in a way that makes me glad he is out of earshot of any of the ladies in the party. I try and calm him down but he continues to be belligerent and argumentative.

Tracy

I want you to pay me some big money, lots of it, and I'll tell you what happened to your ring!

Dan

Well, I'll be glad to pay a reward. In fact, I was going to offer one in the paper tomorrow. Would \$20,000 be enough?

Tracy

That's good – for a down payment. We'll discuss the rest later. Come on out, Slim.

Dan

At this the young lady with whom I had spoken with earlier came out of hiding.

Slim

Okay, boss, I heard it all. He's offered the reward and he can't back out of it now.

Dan

I have no intention of backing out. How extraordinary – I merely want to get the ring back so I can give it to my beloved wife and perhaps make amends and save our marriage. So where can I find it?

Tracy

Here's the deal – your cook was the one who stole it.

Dan

The Chef?

Tracy

Yep – I don't know how he got into the master stateroom, but once he did he brought the ring back to the galley. That much is clear. I just don't know what he did with it from there.

Now, Slim and I are going back to the office. As soon as you confront the Chef and get the ring back make sure you send us the money, as promised!

Dan

So my men and I went back to the galley, where the Chef was sitting in a corner drinking from a bottle of Champagne. He looked as sad as anyone could be.

Chef

Mon dieu! You are back – and by your expression you know all!

Dan

Not quite all. What did you do with the ring?

Chef

That is the tragedy – when you first visited me you scared me so. I thought for sure you had found out, and had come to search me. So I hastily put the ring in the only safe place close at hand. Sacre bleu!

Dan

The salmon? I remember now, you were fiddling with it when I came in.

Chef

(Sadly) Yes. I put the ring in there hoping to get it later but while we were talking the waiters served the dish... And now the ring is lost... forever!

Dan

And it was so. It was little solace to know I would not be paying any reward for the ring's recovery. I had lost the ring and with it the last chance at happiness for my marriage.

And yet – I still had hope. Life is hope for the future, and the possibility you may yet have a good marriage and inspire and help others to enjoy and be successful. That's all that really matters.

Epilog

Stella

It was a very grey and loud nocturnal period. As it got greyer I was getting anxious and began to lick myself. No matter how much I licked it wasn't helping – where **was** she and how was I going to get at the food if she didn't come home?

I had been working at it for months but was still no closer to the mystery of the Thing That Opened Cans. Its siren song was a call to me, but how it worked couldn't fathom. One thing for sure: if I ever figured it out I would never need She Who Walks on Two Legs again.

But she finally came in through the door and I was able to rub back and forth on her to establish that I was, indeed, quite starving to death and it was about time she returned but if she fed me right then and there all would be forgiven.

However, amazing as it sounds she did not pay any attention to me at all – she was more focused on shedding her daytime skin and putting on her dark night skin, along with the feet coverings that made her even higher than she normally was. This was just plain foolishness to me – she had enough trouble balancing herself on just two legs, but to add height to it by wearing those things was just asking for trouble. Although I have to admit they did smell good after she had been wearing them awhile.

In any case, I gave her my best voice to establish “I'm Hungry!” but she seemed lost in thought. I knew this would call for desperate measures – it was pretty clear to me that if she missed feeding me once I would never be fed again, ever.

So as she left my home I made my escape by quickly sneaking out of the Exit blocker that she came in and out of. She closed it behind me and quickly started walking down to the dock.

Once I got outside I kept getting hit by drops of what I was sure belonged in my water bowl. I couldn't figure out who was spitting at me, but kept shaking my head and pressed on.

Outside was lit by what I like to call the Rushing Moon, because the big white light in the sky at nocturnal times means you have to rush around so that other creatures don't get you.

I followed her, although there was a fascinating green plant thing that was growing on the side that almost made me forget what I was doing. But my hunger got the better of me and brought me to my senses, and I continued to watch as she walked up this wooden path onto a floating home.

As a rule I detest water, but food was calling and now my curiosity was aroused. Many of my friends had lost their lives when this had happened, but I was confident I could handle it.

Onboard the floating home I was immediately taken by the tremendous smells of food everywhere. But none of the Things That Walked on Two Legs seemed to be interested in feeding me so I made my way down further inside, drawn on by my nose to the source.

There was a room I recognized as the kitchen, and even cans of food for me, although none of them were as small as I usually had, and I still had the problem of the Opener Thingee. There were two male Things that Walked on Two Legs inside there. One had a very Silly white head covering and seemed distracted by the other. Neither one paid any attention to me. But then I saw it – it was the cat's meow, the source of all that is good and wonderful. It was a fish.

But not just any fish – no, this fish was huge and spread out on a plate just for me, although it would have been more convenient if they had put it on the floor. Still, it was simple to jump up on the High Floor with Four Legs and eat from there.

I had to be careful because the Two Male Two Legs looked to be the sort that wouldn't enjoy me being on the High Floor. It had taken quite a long time to train my own Two Legs so that she understood the High Floor in my own home belonged to me and I didn't have the time right now. But they seemed lost in communications. I must admit I made rather a fat cat of myself, gorging down on that fish until I couldn't eat another bite. I jumped down from the High Floor and

left just as more Two Legs came in to remove what was left of the fish, as they had obviously realized I didn't need it anymore.

I took a leisurely stroll back to my home but had a bit of a problem because the Exit Blocker was shut. So I curled up outside and waited until She Who Walks on Two Legs finally came home. She admonished me for getting outside, but never once said she was sorry for forgetting to feed me.

In any case, shortly after we went in I didn't feel too good and ran up and jumped on the High Soft Floor with Four Feet that She Who Walks on Two Legs sleeps on. She was holding a Cat Annoyer and turning the pages on it so I got her attention by throwing up. But it wasn't just any ordinary hairball – no, this was the cats meow of hairballs, and it was hard and shiny and I was rather proud of it.

She Who Walks on Two Legs was excited about it as well, and took it off and ran to the kitchen and washed it off. I thought she might let me play with it but no, she put more skins on again and took off, muttering something that sounded like “reward”, but she never once gave me any rewards. I will never figure her out.

Life is an open can of food, some very tiny box which I can squeeze myself into for a nap, and perhaps a little cotton mouse on a string. It doesn't get any better than that.

(End Music Sting)